USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest | High Cascades Ranger District
47201 Highway 62
Prospect, Oregon 97536

ORIGINAL

File Code: 1950
Date: April 9, 2010

Dear Interested Citizen

The High Cascades Ranger District, Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest, is requesting your comments regarding the Bybee Vegetation Management Project proposal (referred to as Bybee). This request initiates the scoping process under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Scoping is a procedure by which the Forest Service invites public input, identifies important issues, and determines the extent of analysis necessary for an informed decision on a proposed action.

The Bybee project area boundary is approximately 16,215 acres. It is located in the Upper Rogue River watershed centered at T30S, R4E. The project boundary borders Highway 230 on the West and Crater Lake National Park on the East. Forest Service Road 6535900 and Highway 62 are near the North and South boundaries respectfully. A Bybee Project Area Vicinity Map is attached.

I am requesting your input and involvement in a proposal to treat approximately 3,670 acres in the Bybee project area using a variety of silvicultural prescriptions. All proposed treatments are within Matrix or Riparian Reserves land allocations under the NWFP. However, treatment prescriptions would differ between Timber Suitable 1, Winter Range, Foreground Retention, and Restricted Riparian management strategies as directed by the Rogue River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (1994) and subsequent amendments. This project also proposes fuels treatments that include approximately 4,000 acres of roadside thinning and 2,641 acres of underburning.

Management Direction

The Bybee project area is broken down into the following land management allocations and strategies:

Land Management Allocations and Strategies

NWFP	LRMP	Acres
Matrix	Timber Suitable 1	9,112
	Big Game Winter Range	1,901
	Foreground Retention	552
Riparian Reserves	Restricted Riparian*	4,402
Congressionally Removed	Scenic	248
	Total:	16,215

*Restricted Riparian is less acres than Riparian Reserves

Purpose of Project

The overall purpose of the proposed action for the Bybee Vegetation Management project is to implement management direction from the Rogue River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and to manage for ecosystem health. Specifically, the purpose is to:

1. Improve overall forest health and soil productivity through silvicultural management in natural and managed stands (including disease and insect management), soil compaction treatments, and road decommissioning. Such improvements in forest health are intended to increase the forest's productivity and resilience to high intensity fire, insect and disease attacks, and the uncertainties of climate change.
2. Reduce risk to nearby communities and forest resources from future high-intensity fire.
3. Contribute a sustainable yield of commercial timber and other commodities consistent with land management allocation direction and objectives.
4. Manage, improve, and restore forest and habitat conditions within the following land management allocations and strategies where they occur in the planning area:
    - Riparian Reserves – to meet the objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (Standards and Guidelines, Attachment A to the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl, B-11). Treatments within Riparian Reserves would also follow the standards and guides associated with Restricted Riparian (LRMP, 4-298)
    - Big Game Winter Range – Provide forage and hiding/thermal cover for deer and elk during winter seasons (LRMP, 4-165)
    - Foreground Retention – Maintain or enhance scenery (LRMP, 4-72)
    - Timber Suitable 1 – Manage the lands emphasizing the production of timber volumes, as measured in cubic feet (LRMP, 4-236)
    - Scenic Section of the Designated Upper Rogue Wild and Scenic River – Manage to protect scenic river resources (LRMP, 4-135). Although a small portion of the planning area, no treatments are being proposed in this area at this time.

A driving element in the development of this proposed action is the need to meet the objectives of the recently updated Spotted Owl Recovery Plan. A primary component element of that plan is 'Recovery Action 32', which calls for the need to identify and protect high quality spotted owl habitat where it occurs. There are many stands identified in the Bybee planning area that are currently providing high-quality spotted owl nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat to meet this need. These stands generally have no need for silvicultural or fuels treatments to provide habitat function for the present time. These high quality spotted owl habitat stands (approximately 438 acres) were dropped from consideration for any vegetation and fuels treatments in this project. Within the Matrix/Timber Suitable allocation, there are designated owl 100 acre core areas intended for refugia and connectivity purposes and managed as Late Successional Reserves

(LSR). These areas, totaling 695 acres, are also not suitable for treatment and were not considered in this proposed action. Three hundred meter protection buffers around current northern spotted owl nest sites, totaling 419 acres, removed approximately 210 additional acres from consideration (where not overlapping previously mentioned spotted owl 100 acre core areas). Additionally, 500+ acres of suitable owl habitat, not meeting the high quality standards, were removed from the proposed action in order to minimize adverse effects to the local population of the northern spotted owl.

Proposed Action

Two approaches are proposed to achieve these purposes. Vegetation management using commercial and non-commercial tree removal is the primary approach to achieving the forest conditions sought, but fuel treatment prescriptions in conjunction with, or distinct from, vegetation management treatments are also proposed. The following specific treatments are proposed within the Planning Area:

Commercial Thinning – This is the selective removal of some trees within a stand to increase growth in the remaining trees. Stands receiving this treatment often show signs of decline or sluggish growth because of overcrowding. This form of treatment is generally referred to as "commercial thinning" because the trees are large enough to be sold in commercial timber sales. This prescription favors retention of the healthiest trees that best meet structural and compositional goals. Variable-density thinning will be applied, when needed and possible, to create a more natural arrangement of small openings and clusters. Openings will not exceed ¾ acre and would target disease areas first. Slash from this treatment would be removed as biomass, hand piled and burned, or lopped and scattered.

Pre-commercial Thinning - This treatment is very similar to the one described above, except that it is applied to dense stands of young trees not yet large enough for commercial value. The objective is to maintain or improve growth rates, favor desired species, and reduce mortality due to suppression or from insects and disease. This treatment would be followed with hand piling and burning or lopping and scattering of the resulting slash.

Group Selections – This treatment is an uneven aged regeneration method. Trees are removed and new age classes are established in small groups approximately 1-2 acres in size. This treatment is proposed for stands showing senescence or heavy mortality from insects\disease where a final even-aged regeneration harvest is not necessary or preferred. The intent of uneven-aged regeneration is to regenerate the stand over time with multiple entries creating and maintaining various age classes and structure. Group openings would target disease areas first. Disease resistant trees, such as pines and cedars may be left wherever found in these areas, and planted in the openings that are created. Underburning, broadcast burning, lopping and scattering, or hand piling and burning may all be applied in these areas depending on the amount and continuity of slash produced and the number of resistant trees remaining to be protected.

Overstory Removal – This treatment is proposed generally in previously harvested shelterwood units where Douglas-fir dwarf mistletoe is threatening effective development of a future forest. Shelterwoods are generally stands with two canopies: an overstory of large trees, above an understory of young pre-commercial sized trees. As the label indicates, this treatment removes the large diseased overstory trees. It is routinely associated with a pre-commercial thinning of the understory. Widespread mistletoe in an overstory can continually infect an entire understory and prevent those young trees from ever reaching maturity. That process is well underway in some areas with the Bybee planning area. In the Bybee project, only diseased trees threatening a vulnerable understory are proposed for removal. If the overstory is not diseased, it will not be removed. If the understory is composed of predominantly resistant species, then the overstory, even if diseased, will not be removed. Mistletoe is a valuable ecosystem component for some species, so the goal here is not to eradicate mistletoe, but to protect young threatened forests so they can develop into their desired future condition as described in the Land and Resource Management Plan. A portion of the overstory is typically removed, with some trees left to provide for structure, snags, and coarse woody material recruitment. Some trees may be girdled or topped rather than removed to reduce the spread of disease. This treatment would be followed with handpiling and burning of the resulting slash.

Modified Shelterwood – This treatment is a two-aged regeneration method in which reserve trees are not harvested to attain goals other than for regeneration purposes. These goals include providing remnant trees in the future stand, wildlife habitat, and snag/down wood recruitment. This treatment is proposed in stands that are mostly or completely crashing from disease or insect infestations. This treatment would be followed by site prep and planting of desired species. Slash may be removed as biomass, hand pile burning, or under burning.

Riparian Density Management – This is the thinning of a forest that is overly dense to a degree that is slowing or retarding the development of large trees in Riparian Reserves. This action is proposed only where necessary to meet the objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy in consultation with a professional hydrologist. Operational criteria would be applied to the thinning to limit disturbance, protect stream shading, and maintain the overall health and proper functioning of the Riparian Reserves. Residual tree spacing in Riparian Reserves would be variable and would not have a rigid or grid-like appearance. This treatment would be followed with handpiling and burning of the resulting slash. Project design criteria for thinning and prescribed burning treatments in Riparian Reserves would be implemented to minimize impacts.

Riparian Disease Management - A variation of the approach for riparian areas described above is the clearing of small 'pockets' where root rot has effectively eliminated mature forest or is well on its way to doing so. As described above, this action is proposed only where necessary to meet the objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy in consultation with a professional hydrologist. The goal is to remove the diseased trees, and re-establish a grove of trees not susceptible to root rot (pines and cedars), and more likely to provide stream shade and large woody material for the stream in the long term.

Fuel Management Zones – This includes commercial and non-commercial treatments such as thinning, pruning, underburning, and handpiling and burning up to 300 feet in width on both sides of strategic roadways. These zones are designed to constrain the growth of wildfire, and provide areas where firefighters can safely manage wildfire. This treatment often overlaps other vegetation treatment areas and would be integrated into those prescriptions.

Natural Fuels Underburning – This treatment includes mechanical treatment, underburning, or slashing in conjunction with handpiling and burning to remove unnaturally heavy accumulations of natural fuels (not logging or thinning slash created by human activity).

The attached maps and table display how these prescriptions are proposed to be applied in the Bybee project area.

It is anticipated that where economically feasible, trees would be removed through commercial harvest. The total of these treatments could yield millions of board feet of commercial volume that would be offered in multiple timber sales over the next several years. Other silviculture and fuels treatments could occur over an estimated 10-year period. Commercial tree harvest is a byproduct of this project within Riparian Reserves. The need for tree removal in Riparian Reserves is solely to enhance fish and wildlife habitat, maintain/increase biological diversity in the forest understory, and to reduce the risk of loss to insects and disease.

The majority of these stands are accessed by the existing road system, though approximately 6.5 miles of short temporary roads are likely needed to access some. Many of these temporary roads will follow unclassified existing road beds. No new permanent roads are proposed. Reconstruction of approximately 15 miles of existing system roads is anticipated.

Ground-based (including tractor or skidder) and skyline logging methods are being considered for this proposed action. The terrain is gentle, and the feasibility of successfully logging using these systems is high. Tractors and skidders would to be constrained to use of existing skid roads (from past timber activities) wherever available to prevent further soil compaction in this area. Treatments to ameliorate past compaction, and that caused by this action, are proposed to ensure that soil quality standards will be met or exceeded.

How to Comment

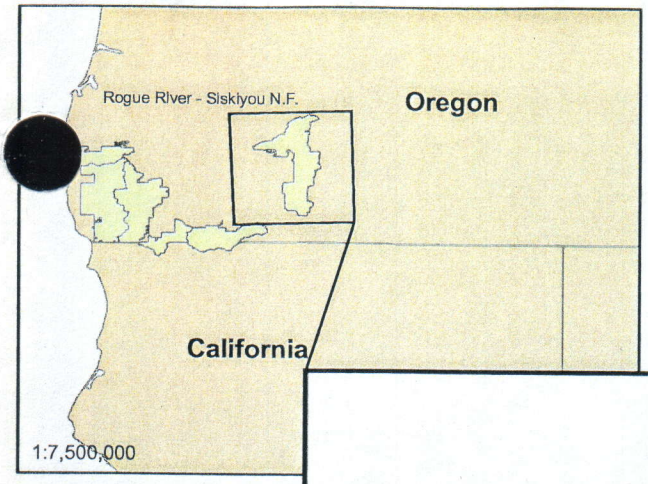
I am interested in hearing any comments, concerns or issues you may have regarding this proposed action. A decision has not yet been made and this letter is part of the continuing public involvement associated with the NEPA process. Those who respond to this request for involvement will continue to be kept informed of our progress and will be notified when our analysis has been completed. Note that all comments received in response to this solicitation will be part of the public record and will be made available for public review and release pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552). Comments must be received within 30 days of the post marked date of this letter and should address specific concerns regarding this proposal.

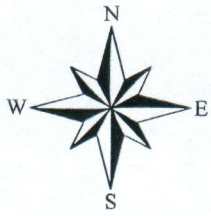
For additional information regarding the proposed action, please call Jason Herron at (541) 560-3441. Please mail comments to 47201 Highway 62, Prospect, OR 97536 or fax comments to (541) 560-3444. You may also e-mail comments to: **comments-pacificnorthwest-rogueriver@fs.fed.us**. Be sure to include the name "Bybee" in the subject line of your email to ensure your input is effectively identified and considered.

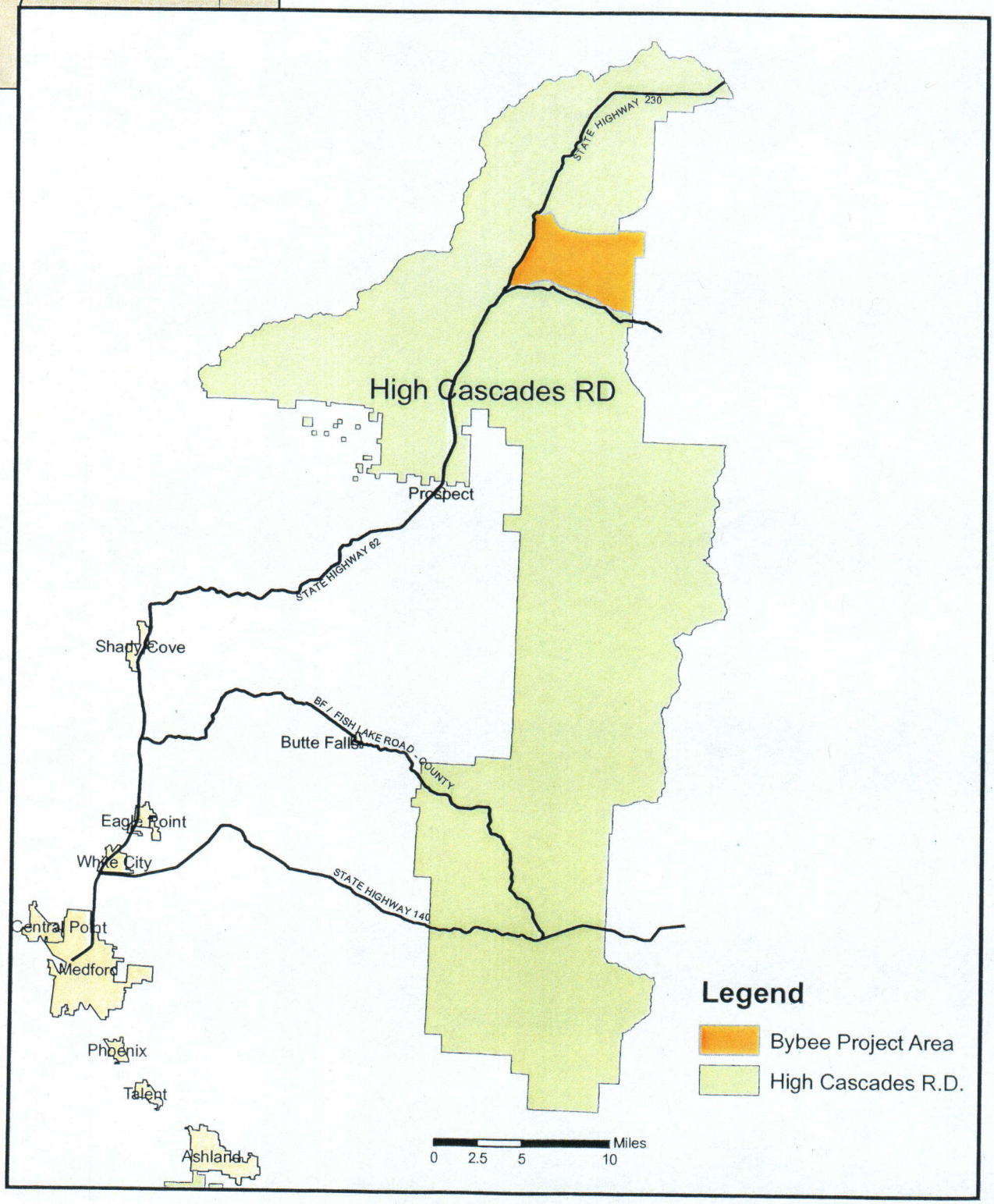
Sincerely,

KERWIN S. DEWBERRY
District Ranger

Bybee Project Area Vicinity Map



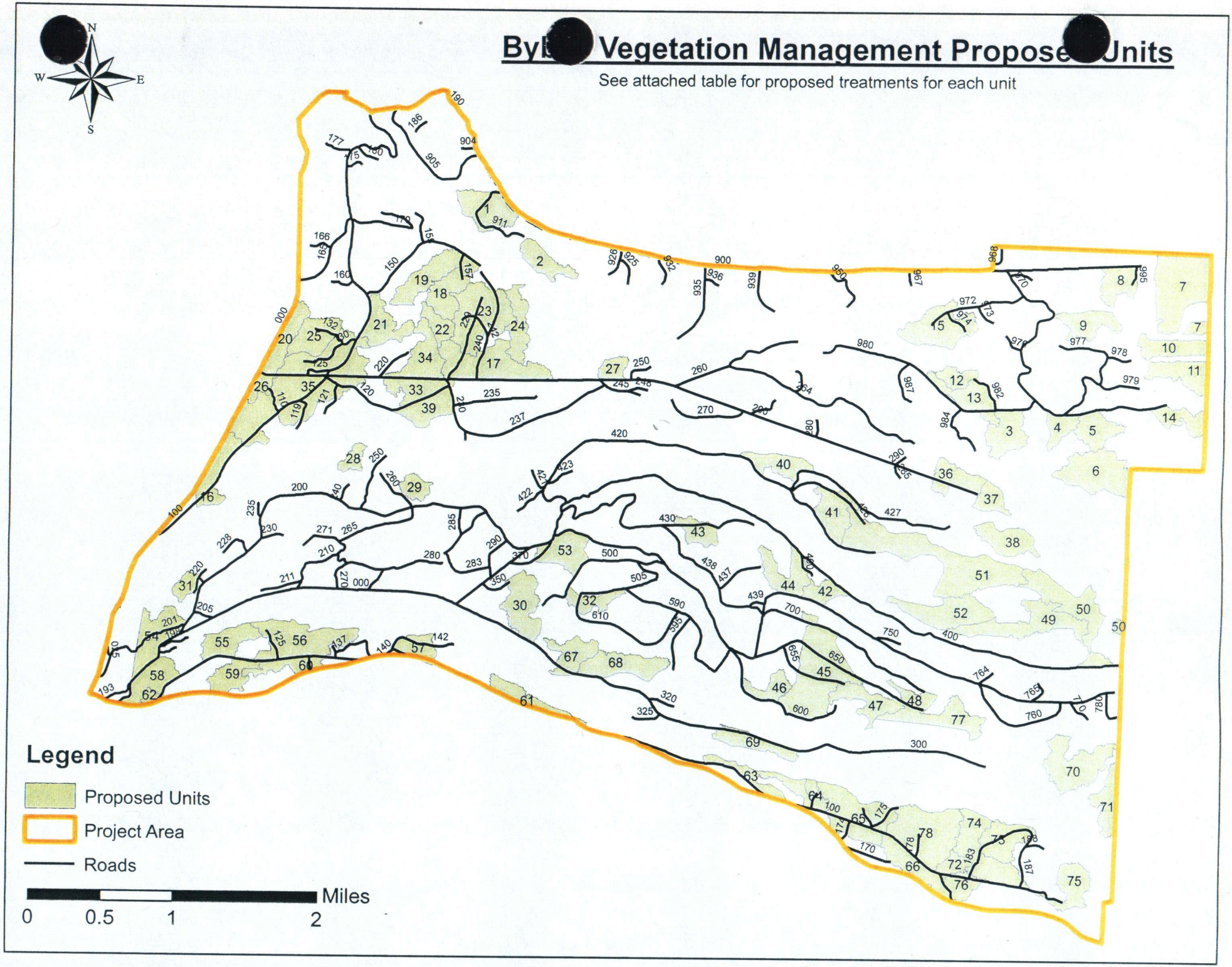




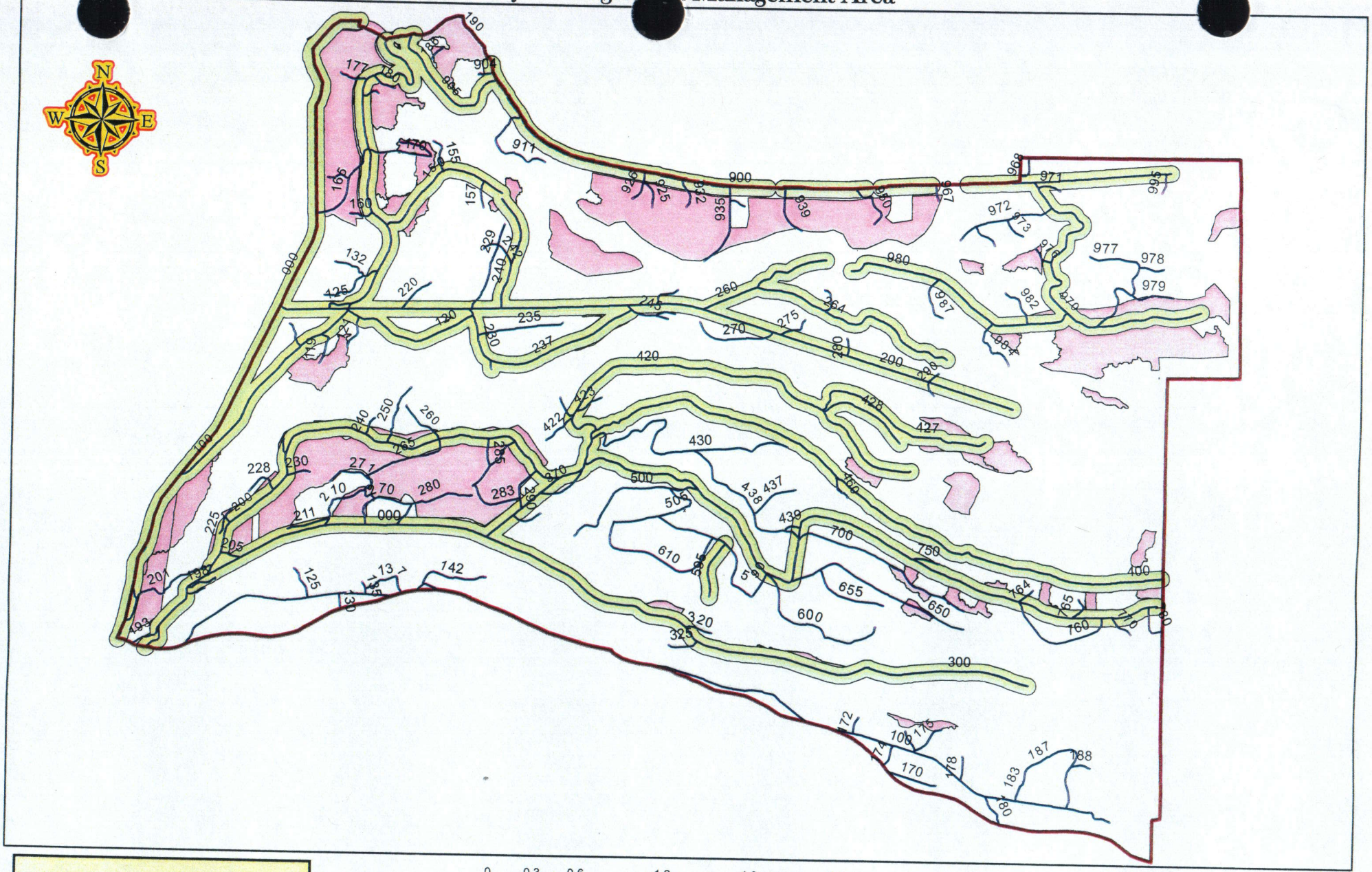
Bybee Unit	Location	Stand	Acres	Bybee Rx
1	6009120	0016	55	Overstory Removal
2	6009120	0023	32	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
3	6009140	0041	44	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
4	6009140	0042	22	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
5	6009140	0043	36	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
6	6009140	0050	75	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
7	6009140	0063	112	Group Selection UEA Regeneration
8	6009140	0077	34	Overstory Removal
9	6009140	0081	37	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
10	6009140	0090	35	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
11	6009140	0092	40	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
12	6009140	0093	19	Overstory Removal
13	6009140	0103	42	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
14	6009140	0108	28	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
15	6009140	0111	67	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
16	6031030	0009	41	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
17	6031030	0013	92	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
18	6031030	0072	40	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
19	6031030	0073	56	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
20	6031030	0080	36	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
21	6031030	0084	41	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
22	6031030	0085	21	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
23	6031030	0086	91	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
24	6031030	0087	37	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
25	6031030	0099	42	Overstory Removal
26	6031030	0112	15	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
27	6031030	0114	17	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
28	6031050	0016	14	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
29	6031050	0025	18	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
30	6031050	0032	57	Group Selection UEA Regeneration with Thinning
31	6031050	0036	15	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
32	6031050	0040	24	Shelterwood EA Regeneration
33	6031050	0042	35	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
34	6031050	0046	50	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
35	6031050	0062	211	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
36	6031060	0031	34	Overstory Removal
37	6031060	0033	21	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
38	6031060	0036	40	Shelterwood EA Regeneration
39	6031060	0045	37	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
40	6031060	0027	34	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
41	6031070	0012	45	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
42	6031070	0016	21	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
43	6031070	0037	25	Shelterwood EA Regeneration
44	6031070	0045	44	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)

45	6031070	0051	126	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
46	6031070	0059	24	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
47	6031070	0060	39	Overstory Removal
48	6031070	0064	17	Shelterwood EA Regeneration
49	6031070	0065	74	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
50	6031070	0069	80	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
51	6031070	0085	162	Thinning (Habitat Downgraded)
52	6031070	0086	63	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
53	6031070	0099	48	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
54	6036010	0005	55	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
55	6036010	0008	38	Overstory Removal
56	6036010	0009	83	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
57	6036010	0011	27	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
58	6036010	0019	42	Overstory Removal
59	6036010	0023	34	Overstory Removal
60	6036010	0025	29	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
61	6036010	0028	32	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
62	6036010	0030	5	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
63	6036020	0037	42	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
64	6036020	0039	14	Thinning (Habitat Downgraded)
65	6036020	0040	84	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
66	6036020	0042	45	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
67	6036020	0043	36	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
68	6036020	0044	53	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
69	6036020	0051	34	Group Selection UEA Regeneration with Thinning
70	6036020	0056	70	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
71	6036020	0063	34	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
72	6036020	0064	16	Overstory Removal
73	6036020	0065	45	Overstory Removal
74	6036020	0066	72	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
75	6036020	0071	40	Overstory Removal
76	6036020	0074	23	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
77	6036020	0081	52	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)
78	6036020	0083	97	Thinning (Habitat Maintained)

Table 1. List of proposed treatments by unit in the Bybee project area.


By[redacted] Vegetation Management Propose[redacted] Units
See attached table for proposed treatments for each unit
N
W
E
S
Legend
Proposed Units
Project Area
Roads
Miles
0
0.5
1
2

Bybee Vegetation Management Area



Legend

- Bybee Vegetation Management Area
- Bybee Roads
- Bybee FMZ- 4001 ac.
- Bybee Natural Fuels Units- 2641 ac.

0 0.3 0.6 1.2 1.8 2.4 Miles

Bybee Vegetation Management Area
T30S R 4E
Project Center 42.952 x 122.343

Produced by Brenda L. Tippin
Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest
High Cascades RD Fuels GIS
This map is a working DRAFT
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